

HURRICANE FICO

Hurricane Fico entered the Central Pacific at 16N-140W on 17 July 1978 with maximum sustained winds near 80 kt (41 m/sec). Fico attained a maximum intensity of 115 kt (59 m/sec) while still in the Eastern Pacific east of 140W. Fico proceeded along the 16th parallel to a point due south of South Point, Hawaii. U. S. Air Force aircraft and satellite reconnaissance and NESS satellite imagery showed a steady increase in Fico's intensity during its travel from 140W to its position south of South Point.

Surf due to open ocean swell from Fico began to rise on the 18th, with some beach road flooding along the southeast coast of the Big Island when Fico was 500 nm (927 km) to the southeast. Higher than normal surf at this time was also enhanced by southerly swell from a southern hemisphere storm. By the morning of the 19th, Civil Defense officials reported 30 foot (9.1 m) surf breaking well offshore with smaller 15 to 20 foot (4.6 to 6.1 m) short period surf doing considerable damage to beach-front homes and roads on the Big Island. Eight to 12 foot (2.4 to 3.7 m) surf was observed on Eastern Maui by noon of the 19th, with water over roads but no damage

reported. Very short period surf of similar heights reached southern Oahu and southern Kauai on the following day.

On July 20 (Fig. 3-38), the hurricane was 175 nm (324 km) south-southeast of South Point with maximum sustained winds of 100 kt (51 m/sec). Late on the 20th, Fico began moving northwestward and maintained 100 kt (51 m/sec) winds until 190 nm (325 km) due south of Kauai. A strong trade wind gradient, increased by the proximity of Fico, caused strong gusty winds over all the Hawaiian Islands with numerous reports of 50 kt (26 m/sec) or more, accompanied by falling trees and power line outages.

Fico maintained hurricane intensity for 17 days and was tracked by the Honolulu and San Francisco National Weather Service forecast offices (with much support from respective NESS units) for approximately 5000 nm (9266 km). The effects of Fico were felt during and after extratropical transition; remnants of Fico, enmeshed in a strong cold frontal system, inflicted heavy rain and up to 40 kt (21 m/sec) winds on ships southeast of Cold Bay in the Aleutians on July 31.

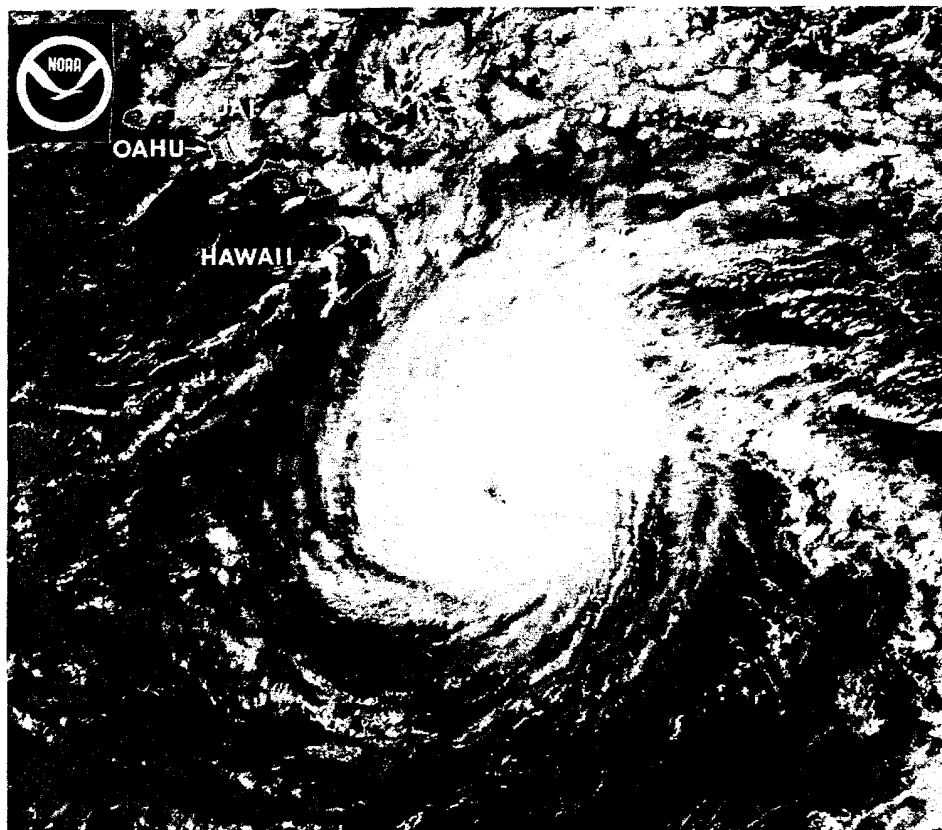


FIGURE 3-38. Hurricane Fico threatening Hawaii, 20 July 1978, 0115Z. (GOES imagery from SFSS, Honolulu, HI)